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Luke S. Roberts, *Mercantilism in a Japanese Domain: The Merchant Origins of Economic Nationalism in 18th-Century Tosa*. Cambridge (Cambridge University Press) 1998. xv + 251 pp. ISBN 0-521-62131-3.

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Luke S. Roberts, *Mercantilism in a Japanese Domain: The Merchant Origins of Economic Nationalism in 18th-Century Tosa.* Cambridge (Cambridge University Press) 1998. xv + 251 pp. ISBN 0-521-62131-3.

When a book has so many endorsements by prominent scholars they overflow the back cover on to the inside, one feels almost provoked to sling a little mud. Unfortunately, this reviewer will pretty much be denied that pleasure. Luke S. Roberts' new book seems destined to become a standard work.

The bulk of research on Early Modern Japan in western languages has focused on the central shogunate rather than regional studies. This is a contrast to Japanese scholarship, which has tended to lean toward a local approach. This is not to say that no such works have been published in English – John Whitney Hall's study of Bizen dates back more than thirty years[1] – but such studies are few and far between. This book closely explores one such domain located on the island of Shikoku. The fluctuations of the economy of Tosa are studied within the context of *kokueki*, a term translated by Roberts as 'prosperity of the country'. The introduction explains the term, provides a historiography of Japanese scholarship (there is not really any in western languages), and general historical background. Chapter two sets the stage by outlining the general political history of the domain. Chapter three examines the detrimental effects of expanding population, over-harvesting of timber and excessive taxation on the local economy. Chapter four covers the finances of Tosa in the seventeenth century and documents how the regional government was able to restore financial health. Chapter five looks at petition boxes; what they were and who put petitions in them. The documentary source compilations which contain the petitions are described critically. Chapter six continues the examination of petition boxes as conveyors of political and economic thought and compares the ideologies expressed by merchants as compared to samurai. Chapter seven examines the causes and cures for Tosa's economic woes in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The conclusion looks at concept of *kokueki* as expressed by thinkers throughout Japan and postulates that the ideas created were instrumental in 'the development of the modern community of Japan'.

It is evident that a tremendous amount of hard work went into the book and it is this hard work that makes it so invaluable. In a time with ever-increasing pressure to publish, few scholars can take the luxury of working through large numbers of Japanese manuscript documents in regional libraries. This detailed study contains much basic information that can form the basis for a variety of comparative studies. It is not likely to be superceded in breadth of detail about Tosa by anything in a western language for a long time.

It is ironic then that the central thesis of the book is not wholly convincing. Roberts contends that *kokueki* was developed by the merchant class and used to rationalize their importance within the confines of a social structure which placed them, in theory at least, at the bottom. This ideology was then adapted by the samurai class as a concept to provide an ideological foundation for policies to improve the financial crisis resulting in economic nationalism at a domainal level. To document his case he seems to have relied solely on the petitions collected from the boxes described in chapters five and six, a source which he himself states, has not survived in totality. This does not seem sufficient to stake a claim for '*kokueki* ideology' or '*kokueki* thought' as opposed to the currency of a simple concept.

Perhaps the need to overstate the case stems from the fact that the book originated in a doctoral dissertation.[2]

In the end, the extent to which one has been persuaded by the relationship of *kokueki* to nationalism will in no way effect the value of the book. This is a fine local history based on excellent scholarship. All Japanese words and phrases have been fully explained but, as the eight-page glossary indicates, there are quite a few of them in the text which may make it tough going for the non-specialist. Those looking to sling mud will have to search for other targets.

Martha Chaiklin

Notes

1 John Whitney Hall, *Government and Local Power in Japan, 500-1700* (Princeton 1966).
2 Luke S. Roberts, *The Merchant Origins of National Prosperity Thought in Eighteenth Century Tosa (Japan)* (PhD Thesis, Princeton University 1991).

Aron Shai, *The Fate of British and French Firms in China, 1949-54: Imperialism Imprisoned.* Basingstoke (Macmillan). In association with St Antony's College (Oxford) 1996. 151 pp. ISBN 0-333-65749-7.

Aron Shai has managed to give an interesting analysis of the fate of foreign economic and financial interests in the first half-decade of the People's Republic of China. Based on hitherto inaccessible public, private and company archives in Britain, France and China, he paints a comprehensive picture of the difficulties British and French firms in particular had to go through to between 1949 and 1954. While the issue is mostly ignored in general works on contemporary history, for example the *Cambridge History of China* and Jonathan Spence's *Search for Modern China* (1990), it is an integral part within the wider context of China's post-revolutionary situation, as well as Britain and France's post-imperial decline, even though in this case of the informal empire.

It is a common thought that from 1949 onwards, as Chinese private industries were gradually nationalised and their property expropriated, so were foreign interests. Shai shows that this was not at all the case. For the Chinese urban sector, the period 1949-1952 formed a transitional period to recover from the destruction of war, and from 1953 until 1957 it was gradually taken over by the state. On the other hand, foreign firms were treated with much more care, and the Chinese government refrained from outright nationalisation. Instead it chose to squeeze as much capital from foreigners and their companies as they could, by applying a concept referred to as 'hostage capitalism'. Shai describes vividly some of the practices this entailed. Policies made it impossible for foreign firms to conduct business and make profits: Excessive taxation, forced subscription to government loans, and restrictive labour policies are mentioned. More notable even is that the government at the same time made sure that withdrawal of those firms from China was extremely difficult. Managers were made responsible for policies of head offices, and if these were not agreeable to Chinese authorities, employees were denied exit visas. The lay-off of abundant workers was forbidden, so that wages remained a heavy burden for the firms, which could only be covered through large remittances sent from abroad.